

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
DISTRICT OF SOUTH CAROLINA

Alden Hiott, *aka Alden D. Hiott*,

Plaintiff,

vs.

State of South Carolina,

Defendant.

James Gibson,
Next of Friend,

Interested Party/Petitioner,

) C/A No. 4:10-2759-JFA-TER

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Report and Recommendation

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Background of this Case

The plaintiff is a person confined as a sexually violent predator. The plaintiff has not signed the complaint (ECF No. 1), but has signed the motion to proceed *in forma pauperis*. The complaint is signed by James Gibson, another person confined. Mr. Gibson seeks appointment of an attorney and a guardian ad litem for the plaintiff. The complaint reveals that this civil action arises out of Mr. Gibson's dissatisfaction with state court judicial proceedings in the plaintiff's annual review hearing relating to his status as a sexually violent predator. Although the complaint lists the state court case docket number as 02-CP-15-858, the exhibits (ECF No. 1-1) indicate that the docket number is 01-CP-15-858.

Pro Se and In Forma Pauperis Review

Under established local procedure in this judicial district, a careful review has been made of the *pro se* complaint herein pursuant to the procedural provisions of 28 U.S.C. § 1915.¹ This review has been conducted in light of the following precedents: *Neitzke v. Williams*, 490 U.S. 319, 324-25 (1989); *Estelle v. Gamble*, 429 U.S. 97 (1976); *Haines v. Kerner*, 404 U.S. 519 (1972); and *Gordon v. Leeke*, 574 F.2d 1147 (4th Cir. 1978).

The complaint *sub judice* has been filed pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1915, which permits an indigent litigant to commence an action in federal court without paying the administrative costs of proceeding with the lawsuit. To protect against possible abuses of this privilege, the statute allows a district court to dismiss the case upon a finding that the action “fails to state a claim on which relief may be granted” or is “frivolous or malicious.” 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B)(i), (ii). A finding of frivolity can be made where the complaint “lacks an arguable basis either in law or in fact.” *Denton v. Hernandez*, 504 U.S. 25, 31 (1992). Hence, under § 1915(e)(2)(B), a claim based on a meritless legal theory may be dismissed *sua sponte*. *Neitzke v. Williams*, 490 U.S. 319 (1989); *Allison v. Kyle*, 66 F.3d 71 (5th Cir. 1995). The court may dismiss a claim as “factually frivolous” under § 1915(e) if the facts alleged are clearly baseless. *Denton*, 504 U.S. at 31. In making this determination, the court is not bound to accept without question the truth of the plaintiff’s allegations, but rather need only weigh the plaintiff’s factual allegations in his favor. *Id.*

This court is required to liberally construe *pro se* documents, *Erickson v. Pardus*, 551 U.S. 89 (2007), holding them to a less stringent standard than those drafted by attorneys. *Estelle v.*

¹Pursuant to the provisions of 28 U.S.C. § 636(b)(1)(B) and Local Civil Rule 73.02 DSC, the undersigned is authorized to review such complaints for relief and submit findings and recommendations to the District Court.

Gamble, 429 U.S. 97 (1976); *Hughes v. Rowe*, 449 U.S. 9 (1980) (*per curiam*). Even under this less stringent standard, however, the *pro se* complaint is subject to summary dismissal. The mandated liberal construction afforded to *pro se* pleadings means that if the court can reasonably read the pleadings to state a valid claim on which the plaintiff could prevail, it should do so, but a district court may not rewrite a complaint or petition to include claims that were never presented, *Barnett v. Hargett*, 174 F.3d 1128, 1133 (10th Cir. 1999), or construct the plaintiff's legal arguments for him or her, *Small v. Endicott*, 998 F.2d 411, 417-18 (7th Cir. 1993), or “conjure up questions never squarely presented” to the court, *Beaudett v. City of Hampton*, 775 F.2d 1274, 1278 (4th Cir. 1985). The requirement of liberal construction does not mean that the court can ignore a clear failure in the pleading to allege facts which set forth a claim currently cognizable in a federal district court. *See Weller v. Dept. of Social Servs.*, 901 F.2d 387 (4th Cir. 1990). Even so, a plaintiff must plead factual content that allows the court to draw the reasonable inference that the defendant is plausibly liable, not merely possibly liable. *Ashcroft v. Iqbal*, 129 S.Ct. 1937, 1949, 173 L.Ed.2d 868 (2009).

Discussion

In the petition filed in this court, Mr. Gibson, on behalf of the plaintiff, is seeking to remove the state court action to this court for the purpose of holding a Rule 59(e) hearing to reconsider a prior decision of the state court.

The petition is subject to summary dismissal because removal is improper. This court lacks jurisdiction or should decline it, and Mr. Gibson has no standing to bring this case.

This federal court cannot review the decision by the Court of Common Pleas. Longstanding precedents preclude the United States District Court for the District of South Carolina from

reviewing the findings or rulings made by state courts. *See District of Columbia Court of Appeals v. Feldman*, 460 U.S. 462, 476 (1983), where the Supreme Court of the United States held that a federal district court lacks authority to review final determinations of state or local courts because such review can only be conducted by the Supreme Court of the United States under 28 U.S.C. § 1257. *See also Rooker v. Fidelity Trust Co.*, 263 U.S. 413 (1923).²

In the complaint, Mr. Gibson seeks removal of the plaintiff's state court case to federal court. It is well-settled that a Notice of Removal must be filed by a defendant in the state court action within thirty days after the complaint in state court is served or within thirty days *after* the case becomes removable. *See* 28 U.S.C. § 1446; and *Heniford v. American Motors Sales Corporation*, 471 F. Supp. 328 (D.S.C. 1979), *appeal dismissed*, 622 F.2d 584 (4th Cir. 1980)[Table]. A Notice of Removal would clearly be untimely.

The plaintiff's next of friend, James Gibson, does not have standing to bring suit on the plaintiff's behalf or on behalf of other persons committed under South Carolina sexually violent

² The State of South Carolina is immune from suit under the Eleventh Amendment, which divests this court of jurisdiction to entertain a suit brought against the State of South Carolina or its integral parts, such as a state agency or department. *See, e.g., Federal Maritime Commission v. South Carolina State Ports Authority*, 535 U.S. 743 (2002); *Board of Trustees of University of Alabama v. Garrett*, 531 U.S. 356 (2001); *Kimel v. Florida Board of Regents*, 528 U.S. 62 (2000); *Alden v. Maine*, 527 U.S. 706 (1999); *Pennhurst State School & Hospital v. Halderman*, 465 U.S. 89 (1984) (although express language of Eleventh Amendment only forbids suits by citizens of other States against a State, Eleventh Amendment bars suits against a State filed by its own citizens); *Virginia v. Reinhard*, 568 F.3d 110 (4th Cir. 2009); *Belcher v. South Carolina Board of Corrections*, 460 F. Supp. 805, 808-809 (D.S.C. 1978); and *Simmons v. South Carolina State Highway Dept.*, 195 F. Supp. 516, 517 (E.D.S.C. 1961).

predator statute. See *Laird v. Tatum*, 408 U.S. 1 (1972); *Valley Forge Christian College v. Americans United for Separation of Church & State*, 454 U.S. 464, 482 (1982); *Lake Carriers Ass'n v. MacMullan*, 406 U.S. 498, 506 (1972); *Flast v. Cohen*, 392 U.S. 83, 99 (1968) (a district court, when determining whether a plaintiff has standing to sue, must focus on the status of the party who has filed the complaint, and that the merits of the case are irrelevant); *Frank Krasner Enterprises, Ltd. v. Montgomery County, Maryland*, 401 F.3d 230, 234-36 & nn. 6-9 (4th Cir. 2005) (collecting cases on standing); *Inmates v. Sheriff Owens*, 561 F.2d 560, 562-563 (4th Cir. 1977) (one inmate does not have standing to sue on behalf of another inmate); and *Hummer v. Dalton*, 657 F.2d 621, 625-26 (4th Cir. 1981) (a prisoner cannot act as a "knight-errant" for others). Cf. *Oxendine v. Williams*, 509 F.2d 1405, 1407 & n. * (4th Cir. 1975) (a *pro se* prisoner cannot be an advocate for others in a class action). Since the plaintiff has not signed the complaint, Mr. Gibson's signature to the complaint does not enable him (Mr. Gibson) to raise claims on the plaintiff's behalf.

Recommendation

Accordingly, it is recommended that the District Court summarily dismiss the above-captioned case *without prejudice*. See *Fitzgerald v. First East Seventh Street Tenants Corp.*, 221 F.3d 362, 363-364 (2d Cir. 2000) ("District courts . . . are . . . capable of determining when an action is frivolous. Indeed, as courts of first instance, district courts are especially likely to be exposed to frivolous actions, and thus have an even greater need for inherent authority to dismiss such actions quickly in order to preserve scarce judicial resources."). The attention of the plaintiff and James Gibson is directed to the important Notice on the next page.

December 8, 2010
Florence, South Carolina

s/Thomas E. Rogers, III
Thomas E. Rogers, III
United States Magistrate Judge

Notice of Right to File Objections to Report and Recommendation

The plaintiff and Mr. Gibson are is advised that they may file specific written objections to this Report and Recommendation with the District Judge. **Objections must specifically identify the portions of the Report and Recommendation to which objections are made and the basis for such objections.** “[I]n the absence of a timely filed objection, a district court need not conduct a de novo review, but instead must ‘only satisfy itself that there is no clear error on the face of the record in order to accept the recommendation.’” *Diamond v. Colonial Life & Acc. Ins. Co.*, 416 F.3d 310 (4th Cir. 2005) (*quoting* Fed. R. Civ. P. 72 advisory committee’s note).

Specific written objections must be filed within fourteen (14) days of the date of service of this Report and Recommendation. 28 U.S.C. § 636(b)(1); Fed. R. Civ. P. 72(b); *see* Fed. R. Civ. P. 6(a), (d). Filing by mail pursuant to Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 5 may be accomplished by mailing objections to:

**Larry W. Propes, Clerk of Court
United States District Court
Post Office Box 2317
Florence, South Carolina 29503**

Failure to timely file specific written objections to this Report and Recommendation will result in waiver of the right to appeal from a judgment of the District Court based upon such Recommendation. 28 U.S.C. § 636(b)(1); *Thomas v. Arn*, 474 U.S. 140 (1985); *Wright v. Collins*, 766 F.2d 841 (4th Cir. 1985); *United States v. Schronce*, 727 F.2d 91 (4th Cir. 1984).